DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 363 593 SP 034 816

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TITLE	A Report on Reports: Two Dilemmas of Genre Teaching.
PUB DATE	May 93
NOTE	22p.; Paper presented at the Working with Genre Conference (Sydney, Australia, May 21-23, 1993).
PUB TYPE	Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Curriculum Development; Elementary Secondary Education; *Expository Writing; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Reports; *Research Papers (Students); Teacher Education; *Teaching Methods; *Writing (Composition); Writing Instruction; Writing Skills
IDENTIFIERS	Australia

ABSTRACT

Through focusing on the genre of informational reports, two dilemmas of genre teaching are explored: (1) a teaching dilemma about how to help students achieve flexible writing competencies through a combination of immersion in text exemplars and instruction in text features; and (2) a curriculum dilemma about how to combine the goals of socialization and critique. The challenge of preparing students to have deep understanding, independent thinking, and critical judgment is hampered by the fact-based, non-evaluative form of information reports frequently required of students. Reports that are fact-based should be enriched by contextualized variations, and should be the beginning of flexible concepts and skills. The teaching strategy most likely to achieve flexible competencies is to give students a formulaic utterance that works for a particular communicative purpose and then to provide situational contexts that motivate appropriate modifications. The social history of the informational report indicates that this report form has a hidden curriculum and promotes a particular kind of knowledge. The kind of knowledge that counts is objective, universally recognized facts; there is no recognition of the specific audience of the report or any indication of evaluation. Both text forms and critical forms of reports should be taught, even with the youngest children. (Contains 22 references.) (JDD)

A Report on Reports: Two Dilemmas of Genre Teaching *

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Through focusing on one genre, informational reports, I will explore two dilemmas of genre teaching:

(1) a **teaching** dilemmas about how to help students achieve flexible writing competencies through a combination of immersion in text exemplars and instruction in text features; and

(2) a **curriculum** dilemma about how to combine the goals of socialization and critique.

Neither of these dilemmas are new to Australian educators. Both appear as issues across the pages of The Powers of Literacy (Cope & Kalntzis, 1993). But from observations and discussions in the US and, more briefly, in the UK and Australia, I think we need reminders to keep both dilemmas in mind.

Dilemma 1: Teaching for Flexible Competencies

Prominent educational discourse in the US argues that changes in the economy demand deeper understanding of knowledge, greater flexibility of skills, and more interpersonal competencies for all students than even many of the elite

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* Paper presented at a conference on "Working with genre III. Strictly genre? Literacies, communities, schools." University of Technology, Sydney, May 21-23, 1993. The conference subtitle "Strictly genre?" deliberately invitess associations to the Australian movie Strictly Ballroom. I am grateful to the Spencer Foundation for support for research and travel.

achieved in the past. One notable result is that statements of educational reform goals often echo many of the tenets of progressive education of an earlier era.

Here are two examples, one from policy-makers, the other from a school principal. First, from a report commissioned by the Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy (1986), A Nation Prepared: Teachers for the 21st Century. The introduction to this report, entitled "A time for ferment", describes the "ferment":

> Much of our system of elementary and secondary education evolved in the context of an economy based on mass production. It emphasized development of the routinized skills necessary for routinized work. These are skills that are now called "basic," [such as] the fundamentals of composition and the reading of straightforward texts.
>
> The skills needed now are not routine. Our economy will be increasingly dependent on people who have a good intuitive grasp of the ways in which all kinds of physical and social systems work. They must possess a feeling for mathematical concepts and the ways in which they can be applied to difficult problems, an ability to see patterns of meaning where others see only confusions, a cultivated creativity that leads them to new problems and new services.

Such people will have the need and the ability to learn all the time, as the knowledge required to do their work twists and turns with new challenges and the progress of science and technology. They will, of course, have to have facts and know how to carry out basic procedures, but it will be essential for them to understand how those facts are derived and why those procedures work. They will spend a lifetime deciding which facts are relevant and which procedures will work for a constantly changing array of problems.

We are describing people who have the tools they need to think for themselves, people who can act independently, and with others, who can render critical judgment and contribute constructively to many enterprises, whose knowledge is wide-ranging and whose understanding runs deep (shortened from pp. 15, 20).

The second statement is by a secondary school principal and director of a coalition of small, innovative public secondary schools in inner-city New York, Deborah Meier, winner of one of the prestigious MacArthur Foundation "genius" awards and, since then, arguably the most visible school principal in the US:

It is not hyperbole to say that today's school reform debate is critical to our national destiny. The challenge is a thrilling one: to make every child the possessor of a kind of intellectual competence once available to only a small minority. This inspiring --

> and new -- task means granting all young citizens the conviction that they can have wonderful ideas, invent theories, analyze evidence and make their personal mark on this most complex world. Such a transformation of the idea of why children go to school would in turn transform the American workplace, as well as the very nature of American life (1992, p. 271).

Both these statements come from the United States, but they describe the challenge in many industrialized countries facing new relationships between the economy and education.

This challenge can also be set forth in terms of British sociologist Basil Bernstein's (1975) analysis of "Class and pedagogies: visible and invisible". According to Bernstein, invisible pedagogy, where criteria of achievement are weakly specified and weakly transmitted, was institutionalized in the British infant schools by, and for, the "new middle class". This is the class whose members "are filling the ever-expanding major and minor professional class, concerned with the servicing of persons" (p. 136). For members of this class, socialization at home and in such schools "leads to ambiguous personal identity and flexible role performances...[A]lthough property in the physical sense remains crucial, it has been partly psychologized and appears in the form of ownership of valued skills made available in educational institutions (pp. 122-23). In Myron Tuman's rephrasing of Bernstein's analysis,

> [I]t is even possible to define professional class

> socialization as motivated by the parents' desire to reproduce in the child, not their specific practices, but the same flexibility and openness in tackling new tasks that so often lies at the basis of their economic success (1988, pp. 48-49).

At the same time as neo-progressive educational environments are being widely advocated, a few voices in the US are raising questions about the power of such environments, with their invisible pedagogies, to achieve such goals with all children. In discussions of the Language Arts curriculum, one influential critic is Lisa Delpit, an African American educator (and also a MacArthur fellow). In two articles in the Harvard Educational Review in 1986 and 1988, which are widely cited in the US and also read, I believe, in Australia, Delpit calls for more explicit teaching, more "visible pedagogy" in Bernstein's terms, of the "discourses of power."

In the final chapter of a new book on teaching in multicultural classrooms, Delpit further explains her concerns. Here she takes issue with what she considers "a dangerous kind of determinism" in recent writings of James Gee (1989)[1], a sociolinguist whose writings she (and I) otherwise admire very much. Delpit writes:

> There are two aspects of Gee's arguments which I find problematic. First is Gee's notion that people who have not been born into dominant Discourses will find it exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to acquire

such a Discourse. He argues strongly that Discourses cannot be "overtly" taught, particularly in a classroom, but can only be acquired by enculturation in the home or by "apprenticeship" into social practices...

The second aspect of Gee's work that I find troubling suggests that an individual who is born into one Discourse with one set of values may experience major conflicts when attempting to acquire another Discourse with another set of values...

Despite the difficulty entailed in the process, almost any African American or other disenfranchised individual who has become "successful" has done so by acquiring a Discourse other than the one into which he or she was born. And almost all can attribute that acquisition to what happened as a result of the work of one or more committed teachers (1993, pp. 286, 290).

Teaching that enables such acquisition entails, I am arguing, resolving the dilemma about how to achieve flexible competencies from explicit teaching.

Consider one example -- about concepts of the world but relevant also to concepts of texts. At a conference on Aboriginal education in Darwin last week (12-14 May, 1993), the first plenary speaker, Vi Stanton, spoke of her own education in the Northern Territory before the second World War. She had learned in school, from pictures and text, about wooley white

sheep; then when evacuated to South Australia when Darwin was bombed, she didn't recognize the "brown" sheep in the SA fields.

"Brown" sheep that were just dirty white may seem a trivial misconception, and one easily remedied. But I fear that identification of sheep with whiteness exemplifies the dangers of impoverished, stereotyped, and therefore inflexible concepts that are too often the outcomes of our teaching, including -- of most relevance here -- the teaching of genres.

Example: The Form of Information Reports

One form of informational reports is produced in schools cross-nationally with notable frequency. "Barn owl" (see Figure 1) is a canonical example from a recent teacher in-service workshop supporting the UK National Curriculum in English: In the US, this form has been so widespread in traditional school teaching that it can be caricatured in the daily newspaper cartoon, Calvin and Hobbes (see Figure 2).

As examples from primary school students, here is the beginning of a report from a US sixth grade student about porpoises:

> The porpoise, with dolphins, are in the family Dephinidae, in the order Cetaceans. You must remember that they are mammals, not fish. There is only one difference between porpoises and dolphins. The head of a dolphin has a "beak", a porpoise doesn't.
>
> There are two common types of porpoises: the harbor

porpoise (Phocoena phocoena) and the Dall porpoise (Phocoeniodes dalli). The Dall porpoise lives in the Pacific Ocean, the harbor porpoise in the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans...

And from Australia, here is the beginning of a first-year child's report about cats:

A cat is a feline mammal. Also it is warm-blooded. Cats can be wild or domestic. Domestic means a pet cat...

In questioning the rigidity of this particular report form, I want to make it clear that I am not arguing for privileging expressions of personal experience over statements of categorical knowledge. You may remember the classroom vignette with which Dickens begins Hard Times. The teacher, Mr. Gradgrind, asks for the definition of a horse. Sissy Jupe, "girl number twenty," the dark-eyed, dark-haired daughter of a circus man, fails to give a definition. In answer to the teacher's questions, she only stammers that her father "belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir," and that "If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir" (p. 5). In contrast, Bitzer, blonde and freckle-faced, recites:

Quadruped. Graminivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye-teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy countries, sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod by iron. Age known by marks in mouth" (p. 6).

Dickens' devastating caricature of mid-nineteenth century education, first published in 1854, may seem irrelevant 150 years later. My point in introducing it here is that even if Sissy Jupe's teacher today were to value her prior cultural knowledge (as Scott came to value Fran's in **Strictly Ballroom**), and even if that teacher wanted to help both Bitzer and Sissy complement their personal experience with more categorical and generalizable knowledge, even then one should ask why these particular kinds of "facts" about horses -- strikingly similar in kind to facts in all the above contemporary school reports -- are considered of most value.[2] (More about this issue in the discussion of the second dilemma.)

I also want to make it clear that I am not arguing for immersion in text exemplars without any explicit instruction. All concept learning -- from the vocabulary learning of one-year olds on throughout life -- benefits from clearly presented prototypical exemplars. (In **Strictly Ballroom**, Scott's eventual success clearly benefited from the steps he learned from both the dance school and Fran's family.) But any one exemplar, like a wooley white lamb, can be only the beginning of flexible concepts and skills, and must be enriched by contextualized variations. This is especially necessary when our initial teaching exemplar is a constructed model, as I presume Barn Owl was.[3]

There is a pedagogical parallel here to issues in second language teaching: How can we most effectively supplement immersion in communicative activities to ensure rich grammatical

knowledge without returning to pattern drills? The answer from Henry Widdowson (of London's Institute of Education) in Aspects of Language Teaching (1990) is to give students a formulaic utterance that works for a particular communicative purpose, and then to provide situational contexts that motivate appropriate modifications. That seems to me the teaching strategy most likely to achieve the flexible competencies that should be our goal, both in second language teaching and in genre teaching to all students.

A columnist in **The Washington Post** wrote last year about "Revealing the codes to success" (Raspberry, 1992). He began:

> There is on my personal computer a function key labeled "Reveal Codes." Pressing that key during a word processing operation transforms the screen. Suddenly I can see not just what is happening but why it is happening (p. A27, emphasis in the original).

My computer program (Word Perfect) has that useful function key too. But unfortunately, the metaphorical generalizability of its function is limited. Textual codes are more complicated than computer codes precisely because of variations inherent in effective non-ritualized human language use. That's why the dilemma of explicit teaching for flexible competencies is such a challenge.

Dilemma 2: Combining Socialization and Critique

Every text form (indeed, every symbolic form nonverbal as

well as verbal, as semiotician Gunther Kress would remind us) has a social history, and that history is an important part of cultural studies. Ethnographically, where does the text form occur today, used by whom, for what purpose? Historically, when and how did it develop? (Anne Cranny-Francis asked these same questions, quoting Bakhtin, about another genre earlier at this conference.) Those forms that become part of what Raymond Williams calls (1977) "the selective tradition" and are given a privileged place in the school curriculum deserve special attention. What hidden curriculum do they entail?

Social history

What is the social history of this report form, out-of-school and in the curriculum? I can't yet answer this question as fully as it deserves. Out of school, this form seems closest to encyclopedia entries, and displays the traces of a derivation from Aristotelian dictionary definitions composed of genus and species ("A cat is a feline mammal.") The first reference books called "encyclopedias" in the 18th Century were subtitled "universal" or "rational" dictionaries (McArthur, 1986). Their function, then and now, is a textual version of museums: preserving and displaying the knowledge deemed significant by society's dominant group.

If, as my examples suggest, animals are a frequent topic for teaching the canonical report form, it may be because the hierarchy of zoological categories is such an "objective", non-

ideological organization of knowledge. Within natural history topics, plants could serve as well, but one would not expect them to be as interesting to children as animals.

Coincidentally, the British Museum, arguably the world's canonical museum, has just issued a book entitled Cats:Ancient and modern (Clutton-Brock, 1992), which is an elegant elaboration of that Australian first-year child's report.

About this form's history in the school curriculum in any country I can say even less, except to suggest a general connection to a philosophy of education that emphasizes transmitting conventional wisdom.

Hidden curriculum

When examples such as Barn Owl become the prototypical "report," there is a hidden curriculum of the kind of knowledge that counts in school -- hidden, but powerful. For both writers and readers of such reports, knowledge is a set, even an exhaustive set, of objective, universally recognized, facts -- the kind, I have to say, that Mr. Gradgrind liked so well. Absent, and seemingly excluded by the form itself, is any indication of the writer's stance, position, interest, and/or relationship to audience that guided, or could guide, the selection of information to include.

Yet, according to the Carnegie report quoted above, "deciding which facts are relevant...for a changing array of problems" is an essential competence. (See the chapter on

"Information and education: The need for critical understanding" in Cazden, 1992, for further discussion.) And at least two studies of how workplace writing contrasts with writing in school stress the importance of the specific audience in workplace memos and reports (Carter, 1990, in the UK; Reigler, 1993, in the US).

Related to the absence of purpose that could guide the selection of information worthy of inclusion is the absence of any indication of evaluation. In Labov's (1972) sociolinguistic analysis of oral narratives of personal experience, he found that narratives that included no evaluative phrases or clauses seemed pointless, inviting a "So what?" response. Isn't the same true of these reports? (Note that the author of "Porpoises" does insert an evaluative perspective in admonishing the reader "You must remember" and underlining "mammals".)

In privileging a form for reporting knowledge that excludes purpose or evaluation -- mindless as well as heartless, one could say -- aren't we making an implicit statement about knowledge itself? Doesn't the form hide the interpreting mind that created such categories in the first place? And doesn't the form make less likely the kind of critical response called for by the Carnegie Forum from "people who have the tools they need to think for themselves...[and] render critical judgement" (1986, p. 20).

Finally, presentation of knowledge in such a form makes difficult, if not impossible, any response from the reader(s) except acceptance. The presentation is monologic; there is no invitation to dialogue or negotiation about alternatives. As a

pedagogical strategy, teaching such a form would seem to limit, rather than expand, alternative interpretations and categorizations of the material at hand.

Reports in this canonical form may seem harmless when they present taxonomies of information about plants and animals. But applied to the social world, even the audienceless entries in encyclopedias should be read with skepticism and critique. And contemporary Australian issues of land rights and environmental policies make boundaries between the natural and social worlds harder and harder to defend.

Here, as with my first dilemma, I do not want to be misunderstood. I am not arguing from a position of post-modernist relativity. There are facts of social life: The Holocaust happened. And so did the Gulf War. As Christopher Norris (1992) puts it in a recent critique of what he considers misreadings of Derrida, the Gulf War was not "discourse all the way down." But the US Pentagon authored not only the war itself but also the interpretations transmitted by CNN (which appeared on Australian TV too, I'm told), and the pictures turned out to be as misleading as the words.

"Facts of the matter" are physical actions. Representations of those actions are not facts but interpretations of them. To take another example from the more remote past:

> Certain European men set foot on the shores of your country and mine at a certain time in the past.

That was, and is, a fact. But all statements about those

actions are representations -- constructed at a particular point in time, from a particular position, for some intended addressee or audience. The difference between representations of that act of stepping ashore as **discovered** or **invaded** can stand for the relativity, not of the factual action, but of the interpretive representation. During 1992, even young children in US schools discussed the significance of these alternative words.

It is not sufficient to say that we first socialize students into the use of text forms -- such as the report form I am questioning here -- and later critique with them the hidden curriculum of those forms and their use to position readers and manipulate their readings. Our very choice of forms to teach, and ways of teaching them, must take into account both goals, even with the youngest children.

In the opening session of this conference, Mary Kalantzis described with admiration the hybrid dance genres created through cross-cultural negotiation by Scott's enactive imagination in Strictly Ballroom. In the same session, Gunther Kress asked us to consider which dispositions toward comprehending and creating particular "representational resources" will make innovations needed for the future more likely.

I am questioning the pride of place given in school genre teaching to pure forms of informational reports that embody a hidden curriculum of truth as universal and timeless, and thereby may create a disposition, a "habitus" (as Kress quoted Bourdieu), against openness to cultural differences and future change.[4]

Conclusions

The first of my two dilemmas -- how to build flexible competencies from explicit teaching -- applies to all genre teaching. The second dilemma -- how to combine socialization and critique -- applies with special force to school reports, which at least in some primary classrooms seems to be the most common genre of all.[5]

Dilemmas are never resolvable by adopting one pure alternative or the other. They require some creative transformational solution that avoids both extremes. I look to Australia for continuing experimentation in how to do just that.[6]

Notes

1. Gee's (1990) book, published in the same series as Kalantzis & Cope (1993), includes the material in Gee (1989).

2. I am indebted to Eileen Landay, now of the Department of Education, Brown University, for pointing out this similarity.

3. Linguists may remember the criticisms leveled at transformational grammarians for basing their grammatical analyses on sentences constructed ad hoc at the blackboard rathern than on utterances spoken in some moment of social life.

4. Cazden (in press) explores the contrasting history of another genre, personal experience narrative, which contrasts with the

reports discussed here. It is exemplified by another young chil's composition about cats:

The cat climbed the tree
because my dog scared the cat.
My mom climbed the tree
on the ladder to get the cat.
The cat climbed down the tree.
A little of its skin came off.

5. My impression is that in Australia, such programs could be characterized as post-process writing, influenced by the current genre teaching movement; whereas in the US they would be in the (still numerous) more traditional, pre-process writing classrooms. Atwell (1989) includes accounts by US intermediate grade teachers in process writing classrooms of informational texts of many kinds, all different from the Barn Owl model.

6. In her plenary talk at this conference, Frances Christie preferred the term tension to my dilemma. For me, `tension' one can live with, while a `dilemma' requires resolution. Or, to explain my choice of terms in another way, `dilemma' includes the meaning of `tension' while adding the prospective implication that further work, mental or otherwise, is needed.

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1. Gee's (19XX) book, published in the same series as Kalantzis & Cope (1993), includes the same material.

2. I am indebted to Eileen Landay at the Harvard Graduate School of Education for pointing out this similarity.

3. Linguists may remember the criticisms leveled at transformational grammarians for basing their grammatical analyses on sentences made up at the blackboard rather than on utterances spoken in some moment of social life.

The Barn Owl

The Barn Owl is a bird of prey.
It is an endangered species, it lives in barns and trees. They are nocturnal.

Description
Its face is like a plate which is used as a satellite dish. The sound bounces off

The feet
The Barn Owl has tiny feet and sharp claws because it has to pick up its prey.

The colour
It has brown speckles and a white face. It has white under the wings and a white belly. There are furry-speckled feathers on its back.

Habitat
The Barn Owl lives in barns and chimneys. The Barn Owl does not make nests.

Food
It is a carnivore and it eats mice, rats, wild gerbils and ba.., rabbits.

Movement/Speed
The Barn Owls fly fast and silent and glides and it flies low, so that the prey can't hear it coming The Owl is endangered because people are moving to barns and also because mice eat chemicals and the owls eat the mice and they die.

CALVIN AND HOBBES by Bill Watterson